



## RICIN TOXIN

Ricin is a potent protein toxin derived from the beans of the castor plant (*Ricinus communis*). Castor beans grow worldwide, and the toxin is fairly easily produced.

### **Infection**

Because ricin is toxic by numerous exposure routes, its use by terrorists might involve poisoning of water or foodstuffs, inoculation via ricin-laced projectiles, aerosolization of liquid ricin or distribution of a powder.

### **Symptoms**

Weakness, fever, cough and pulmonary edema occur 18 to 24 hours after inhalation exposure, followed by severe respiratory distress and death from hypoxemia in 36 to 72 hours.

### **Treatment**

Management is supportive and should include treatment for pulmonary edema. Gastric decontamination measures should be used if ingested.

### **Vaccination/Prophylaxis**

Currently, no vaccine or prophylactic antitoxin is available for human use, although immunization appears promising in animal models. Use of a protective mask currently is the best protection against inhalation.

### **Decontamination**

Health-care workers should take standard precautions. Secondary aerosols generally should not be a danger to health-care providers. Weak hypochlorite solutions (0.1% sodium hypochlorite) and/or soap and water can decontaminate skin surfaces.

**For more information, call the North Dakota Department of Health at 701.328.2378.**